# EAHR 811 Jim Thompson Chapters 10 and 11

## Chapter 10 – Clarifying the evaluation request and responsibilities

### Why do people want evaluations?

* Sponsor 🡪 agency (individual) that authorizes the evaluation and provides necessary fiscal resources for its conduct.
* Client 🡪 agency (individual) who requests the evaluation (may be synonymous with sponsor.)
* Stakeholders 🡪 anyone who has a stake in the program evaluation or results.
* Audiences 🡪 anyone who has an interest in the evaluation and *receives* the results!
* Important to understand what prompts an evaluation! Decision to perform an evaluation initiated by someone’s ‘need to know!’
* Evaluator must probe to clarify the purpose and procedure:
  1. Why is the evaluation being requested? (who wants to know what?)
  2. What will the evaluation being used for? (good or evil? ethical dilemma???)
  3. What is being evaluated? (include, exclude, setting, time, issues, charge, delivery)
  4. How do program activities link to the goals and objectives?
  5. What resources are available for the evaluation? (always time & money!!!)
  6. What is the political climate and context around the evaluation? (factors, forces)
* Informal Uses of Evaluation 🡪 enhance our understanding of the value the ‘object.’
  1. Determine if needs exist to initiate a program.
  2. Assist program planning – identify possible program models.
  3. Describe program implementation – have there been changes to the model?
  4. Are program goals and objectives being met and at what level.
  5. What is the overall value of the program? (cost, value, comparison to other models.)
* Non-informational Uses of Evaluation 🡪 sometimes the presence of an evaluation makes a difference (YES!!! – absolutely!) and usually changes behaviour.
  + Important benefit of evaluation is educating ‘others.’ (improving skills, empowering stakeholders, stimulate deliberative democracy.)
  + Some ‘not so good’ examples include: postponement, ducking responsibilities, public relations, fulfilling grant requirements.

### When are evaluations inappropriate?

* Not always used appropriately. Major clients are alienated. Resources inadequate, ethical violation.
* Evaluation would produce trivial information 🡪 simply lacks sufficient impact to warrant the expense of formal evaluation.
* Evaluation Results Will Not be used 🡪 evaluation is based on assumption that every program must be evaluated!
* Evaluation cannot yield useful, valid information 🡪 evaluation will not produce any relevant information...”The evaluator needs to recognize when an evaluation is doomed to fail...”
* The type of evaluation is premature for the stage of the program 🡪 summative evaluations may be harmful to new programs – a common problem – avoid ‘immediate evaluations.’
* Propriety of Evaluation is doubtful 🡪 one of the four attributes of an ethical evaluation, protect the rights of those involved in the evaluation!

### When are they appropriate?

* Evaluability Assessment – criteria deemed necessary for meaningful evaluation:
  + Program objectives (side effects, important information needs.)
  + Program objectives are feasible to achieve the target audience.
  + Intended uses of information well defined.
* Determining whether a program is evaluable:
  + Clarify the intended program model or theory.
  + Examine the program implementation – does it match program model?
  + Which evaluation approach would work best?
  + What are the priorities of the evaluation?

### What is the difference between an internal and external auditor?

* External Auditor 🡪 impartial, objective, credible, expertise, fresh, advocates.
* Internal Auditor 🡪 knowledge, familiar, history, advocate, known.

### How do you select an appropriate evaluator?

* Consider evaluator competencies (skills, knowledge, research, design, methods.)

### Using the different approaches to clarify the evaluation needs!

* All models can be implemented by either internal or external evaluators.

## Chapter 11 – Setting Boundaries and Analyzing the evaluation context

### How to determine the intended audience.

* Planning stage – identify all the various stakeholders and audiences, reduce anxieties.
* Adequate only if collects and reports information to all legitimate audiences.
* Frequent mistake to narrow the audience, concentrate on the squeaking wheel..all audiences are not interested in the same information. How do you set the boundaries of the evaluation?

### What resources and capabilities can be committed to the evaluation?

* Fundamental step in gaining a clear sense of what evaluation is all about.
* Incomplete descriptions can lead to faulty judgments.
* Program Description 🡪 critical elements to be evaluated (includes goals & objectives.)
* Factors to consider in characterizing the ‘object’ of evaluation:
  + What problem was the program designed to correct?
  + What are the major components and activities?
  + What is the program’s setting and context?
  + Who participates in the program?
  + What is the program’s history?
  + When and under what conditions is the program to be implemented?
  + Are there unique contextual events or circumstances?
  + What resources are consumed in using the program?
  + Has the program been evaluated previously?
* Using program theory to describe the program:
  + Causal hypothesis – problem solved or reduced by the program.
  + Intervention hypothesis – program actions to the purported cause.
  + Action hypothesis – program activities with reduction of original problem.

### What are some of the variables that are influenced by the evaluation approach?

* Clients themselves view resources committed to the evaluation as resources taken away from the program itself!

### When should you proceed with the evaluation?

* Reasons for the evaluation 🡪 best indicators of meaningful evaluation!

## Part B – Application and Observations

The concepts brought forward by these two chapters are very interesting. They iterate the significance of getting a good start to the project and keeping control of the program thru the evaluation process. There is an ‘old saying’ in aviation. “A good landing follows a good approach, which follows a good circuit!” Or, in other words pre-planning prevents poor performance.

Clarifying the expectations of an evaluation is critical in determining how you are going to conduct the evaluation. The description of the different stakeholders and their interests is crucial to understanding how the evaluation will progress. Who wants the evaluation? Is this a mandatory or voluntary evaluation? What are the risks of completing a successful evaluation? People who grew up watching the Flintstones at lunch time may be able to relate the three questions Fred asked, while impersonating the wayward company President, to clarifying the scope of an evaluation request...”Whose baby is that? What’s your angle? I’ll buy that!” I keep asking myself if there is a significant difference between project management and program evaluation process?

For several years I have been involved with a sporting organization which must provide a yearly project plan and follow-up to Sask Sport for funding purposes. Chapters 10 and 11 remind me of the process which was required to demonstrate the need for access to lottery funding, and the justification to stakeholders that the funding had been spent on projects initially identified in the planning report.

In the spring what was supposed to be a group or Board of Directors planning session often defaulted to the association executive to come up with a plan for the upcoming year. The President would prepare the plan, based on previous approved plans, for approval by Sask Sport.

At the end of the year, the follow-up report would be used to compare whether outcomes had met the goals of the year. The follow-up report also included a financial audit to document how the grant funds had been allocated to the clubs and associate members of the sport. As the grant money available from Sask Sport decreased, the ‘value’ of the program evaluation diminished within the association.

People became only interested in what funds they were allocated, and the challenge became to have the stakeholders provide the appropriate documentation that would support the follow-up report. Within the context of a program evaluation, the value of the follow-up report can be scrutinized. Everyone associated with the follow-up report was going thru the motions to meet the requirements of the process. The value to the sport and funding association was questionable. Everyone knew what was expected and was able to provide what was needed. Did the follow-up report meet the needs of the stakeholders?

The boundaries of the follow-up report were determined by the yearly plan, review schedule, goals and objectives, and procedures of the funding body. The major audience for this report was the Board of Directors of Sask Sport. Other stakeholders such as affiliate clubs and associate members had some interest in the follow-up report but their lack of participation in the process met that the association President often spent more time educating and defending the evaluation than actually using the evaluation results to construct and build the association.

Conversely, without the evaluation process, the effectiveness of lottery funding to the sport would have been more difficult to defend or justify. One of the pre-requisites of lottery funding is that the funds must be used for non-capital expenditures to offset the cost of the sport to the participating members. Expenses such as insurance, membership fees, and costs associated with participation (travel, sustenance, administration, etc.) are eligible expenses for Sask Sport funding.

A significant cost to our sport was capital assets. The association board was consistently challenged by affiliate clubs and associate members to use lottery funding for capital purchases. If an evaluation process had not been in place or the members did not know of the evaluation process, the association board would have had a significant challenge in ensuring that funds were spent as mandated by Sask Sport. Within these constraints the program evaluation was effective.